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N E W S

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RACCOON-RABIES VACCINATION BAITING SLATED FOR SEPT. 6 to 25

Operations May be Extended due to Weather

COLUMBUS – The Ohio departments of Health (ODH) and Natural Resources (ODNR), in partnership with the U.S. Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Wildlife Services program and local health departments (LHDs) will begin fall oral rabies vaccination (ORV) operations Sunday in 16 northeast and eastern Ohio counties.

“This local, state and federal partnership shows our commitment to controlling raccoon-rabies variant in Ohio,” said ODH Director Alvin D. Jackson, M.D. “Please show your commitment by vaccinating your pets.”

As in past years, vaccine-bait distribution will take place in all of Ashtabula, Columbiana, Geauga, Jefferson, Lake, Mahoning and Trumbull counties and parts of Belmont, Carroll, Cuyahoga, Harrison, Monroe, Noble, Portage, Summit and Washington counties. Baits will be distributed by various methods in each county, including fixed-wing aircraft, helicopter and LHD staff in vehicles.

Residents in the areas to be baited should be aware of low-flying aircraft and should keep children and pets away from the baits.

Rabies is a viral disease that affects mammals and people. It is almost always fatal. Since the mid-1970s, a rabies variant associated with raccoons has spread rapidly through the eastern United States. Spring and fall vaccine baiting operations are intended to help curb the spread of raccoon-rabies variant (RRV) west of an immune barrier established by regular rabies vaccination that began in 1997. This immune barrier has successfully slowed the spread of rabies into Ohio from Pennsylvania and West Virginia. As of Aug. 31, 2009, one skunk was confirmed positive from Lake County for RRV, down from nine rabid animals (seven from Lake County and two from Trumbull County) during 2008.

Weather permitting, baiting will begin Sunday, and will cover 4,761 square miles of the state’s northeastern and eastern border. Aerial distribution should be complete within 10 days; ground baiting may continue beyond Sept. 25 depending on weather.

Two types of baits will be used. Airplanes will drop a small plastic sachet, about the size of a ketchup packet, coated in fishmeal. In urban areas, the vaccine will be inside a hard, brown, 2-x-2-inch fishmeal block that will be distributed by vehicles staffed by LHD and other local agency volunteers. Most of the 877,680 baits will be distributed by air, with the use of specially equipped white Beechcraft King Air planes from Dynamic Aviation and a helicopter from the ODNR.

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Residents should avoid the baits and keep pets confined during the baiting period. Dogs in particular are attracted to the baits and will occasionally eat them. The baits are not harmful to pets. Please keep the following information in mind:

- Know what the baits look like. The coated sachet, which will be distributed by aircraft, is about the size of a ketchup packet. It is white and rolled in a brown fishmeal glaze. In urban areas, where baits will be distributed by vehicle, the sachet will be inside a hard, brown fishmeal block, about 2-x-2-inch square.
- Instruct children to leave the baits alone.
- Once your area is baited, keep dogs and cats inside or on leashes for up to five days. Most baits disappear within 24 hours; however, it is important raccoons have every opportunity to eat them.
- Do not attempt to take bait away from your pet; you may be bitten.
- Anyone handling baits should wear gloves. If baits are found in areas frequented by pets or children, toss them into deeper cover. Damaged baits can be disposed of in the trash.
- If a person is exposed to the vaccine (red liquid), thoroughly wash any areas of the skin that came into contact with the vaccine with soap and water.
- If someone has been exposed to the vaccine or has questions about the baiting, call your LHD or ODH's information line at 1-888-722-4371.

The rabies virus is found in the saliva of affected animals, most often raccoons, skunks and bats, and is spread by a bite or scratch. Bats, raccoons and skunks pose the greatest risk of rabies in Ohio. To protect your family against this still-deadly disease:

- Avoid contact with wild animals and animals you do not know.
- Vaccinate your pets against rabies and keep them current on their shots.
- If bitten, call your doctor. If your pet has contact with a wild animal, call your veterinarian. Rabies exposures should also be reported to your LHD.

Ohio's partners in the multistate baiting are Maryland, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia, in what is known as the Appalachian Ridge ORV program. The seven-state effort will involve distribution of about 5 million baits and cover more than 26,000 square miles. ODH has participated in the program since 1997 and has dropped almost 13 million baits in Ohio over that time.

Editor's note: The third World Rabies Day will take place during the operation, Sept. 28. The goal is to engage at least 55,000 people across the world to take action on this day - one person participating for every human victim of rabies who died needlessly during the year. This is a day to inform and educate people about the reality of rabies. More information is available at: <http://www.worldrabiesday.org/>

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Contact: Ohio Department of Health – Office of Public Affairs (614) 644-8562

Editors: Please note the following from the Ohio Department of Natural Resources:

“According to Ohio Administrative Code 1501:31-15-03, it is illegal to live trap, move and release raccoons. Persons dealing with a nuisance raccoon cannot relocate the animal. There are only two legal options for nuisance raccoons; euthanize or release on the same property where they were live trapped. Uninformed people who are relocating nuisance raccoons may be contributing to rabies crossing the barrier.”